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Columbus, Ga., and General Henry L. Benning

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The following article was written for the *Columbus Evening Ledger*, but with the kind consent of the author, we are permitted to use it here, feeling assured that it will prove of interest to our readers on account of the historical facts contained in it.—*EDITOR*.

War telegrams, memorial days and patriotic women are not the only reminders of martial days "then and now." There are other reminders when war news is coming and our streets are full of soldiers and I want this afternoon to tell your readers whom I do not know something about the war notes sounding in Columbus before and in 1861.

Before doing this I may tell something about the origin of this old town and briefly the part she took in other wars.

Columbus is one of the most historic places in America. This is not generally known, but it is a fact. Long before 1827 and long before 1733, when Yamacraw Bluff was settled by General Oglethorpe, Columbus was right here on the Chattahoochee river at the foot of its Coweta falls, and was the most important Indian town in all this country between the Mississippi river and the Atlantic ocean. How long it had been so regarded by the Southern states no one knows, but Oglethorpe and his handful of followers found it that way in 1739, when white men, for the first time, so far as anybody knows, saw it. This was only six years after Oglethorpe landed at Savannah (Yamacraw Bluff). He found here, where Columbus now is, the famous and very important place known as Cowetah—afterwards Coweta Town—and changed in name

by the whites in a legislative act to Columbus. It is well known that all this territory was the country of the Upper and Lower Creeks, the great Indian nation known as the Muskhogees, or Creek Confederation. We have today, for our county and social club, this very name spelled Muscogee. Above the 34th line were the Cherokees, a powerful tribe in the upland and mountain country of Georgia and Tennessee. They cooperated with the Creeks in general political and war matters. The Creek Confederation was made up of smaller tribes. I could not now give all of them, but there were among them, the Hitchcittees (now a creek in Chattahoochee county); the Uchees (now a creek in Alabama); the Coosas (now the Coosa river) the Apalachee (now a bay just below us); the Seminoles in Florida; the Wetumpkes (now Wetumpka) and so on. But especially there was a tribe called the Cussetahs, from which comes our Cusseta in Chattahoochee county, and the Oscocoochees from which tribe was an Indian town called Oscayoochee and now our Oswitchee (or Oswichee). It is nine miles southwest of Columbus. In Indian days this place was surrounded by and had in it magnificent woods and splendid trees. Just here Oglethorpe came in 1739 and met under these trees the Indian chiefs and settled a treaty which bound the Georgia colony and England her parent and the Great Creek Confederation. That treaty kept the Spaniards in Florida from getting the Indians on their side, and eventually saved to England and America all of the country south of the Potomac river and east of the Mississippi. So it was that in this section is this Coweta Town, existing long prior to and through the Revolutionary war and down to 1827. Let us remember that Georgia then was actually only a little strip of land between the Savannah and Oconee rivers extending to the headwaters. The English charter granted land west to the South seas, but Georgia as a colony, could not "occupy" as the Indians held the land. It took grants and treaties for the white man to get it. He got his first grant confirmed which he was occupying between the two above named rivers. Then by treaty and purchase he got the land between the Oconee

and the Ocmulgee rivers; then between that and the Flint river (Thronateeska in Indian) and lastly between the Flint and the Chattahoochee. This last was long after the Revolutionary war and long after the end of Georgia as a colony. As a state, Georgia agreed with the United States Government to let her part of the great war debt go at exchange for all her land west of the Chattahoochee. The government took it and made Alabama and Mississippi out of it, executing treaties with the Indians by which they gave up all their land in these states and went to Indian Territory. That is the reason all residents of these two states trace their land titles back to Indian grants. Georgia owned her land; cut it into forty 200 and 250 acre lots, and had big lottery schemes to start her titles. In laying off her lots she reserved a strip over here where Coweta Town stood and called it the Coweta Reserve, and cut it into ten and twenty acre lots. Coweta Town stood along its western edge and on the river being about half way between the 32d and 33d parallel of latitude. In 1827 the General Assembly authorized five commissioners to lay out not less than five hundred half-acre building lots at Coweta Town and give it a name. The commissioners did this and called it Columbus. In 1828 the General Assembly incorporated the town under this act and the people elected an intendant (mayor) and six commissioners (aldermen). Columbus then started out on its history. It would be intensely interesting to recount this history, social, religious, political, civil and military. I began, expecting to tell something about the last and especially in the sixties, as contrasted with what we see in and about here now. I find, however, that it has been necessary to write about the "founding of the city" (*ab urbe condita*).

I have written about the origin of Columbus. Let us read now a few lines about her military history. It is pertinent just at this time. We have a training camp and because of this present war our streets are filled with khaki boys. Everybody is doing what he can to help on our side. Columbus always did that.

A man recently said this about Columbus: "You have a fine set of people down here and I have found after half a century of observation that they always make good. If there are any black berries about, Columbus seems to claim she has the largest and most juicy; so with apples. She always has the largest and reddest. If a group of women are together, Columbus claims she has the handsomest and best in the lot; she always thinks she is just a little bit ahead of any community with which she may be contrasted." And said he, "I believe she has a right to say so." Think of this coming as it did from a life-long resident of Atlanta! He knew Columbus and her people, however, for he had visited here from the beginning of his long life.

So it has been with Columbus about her soldiers and her interest in the welfare of her section and her country.

When she was laid out in 1827, the town proper was bounded on the south and west by the river, on the north by what is now Sixteenth street, and on the east by what is now Sixth avenue. The land north to Seventeenth street and east to Tenth avenue was commons. It was made into lots and tracts in 1873. In 1887 Rose Hill was annexed and later East Highlands. Wynnton has always been a suburb and so has Girard and Phoenix City. Many people think Girard is older than Columbus. As a matter of fact it was not laid out until 1834. All lands across the river were Indian lands as before stated. Phoenix City, at first Browneville, was not known till after the Civil war. Now, including the Alabama suburb, Columbus has a population of about forty thousand. At first she was but an Indian trading town. In 1860 there were only about eight thousand people within her limits and not over two thousand in her suburbs, including Alabama.

In those early days of her existence all her male population could shoot and were prepared to do so. Just as now, the men felt that some organization in this line should be had, and so at the very first, what was called the "Frontier Guards" came into life. In 1831, however, they disbanded and in September of that year there was organized the "Columbus Volunteers"

with A. S. Rutherford, captain. Notwithstanding the treaties there were Indian troubles constantly arising, for the whole country was filled with Indians.

The Columbus Guards were organized with Dr. John A. Urquhart as captain, sometime prior to 1835, but in May of that year they received their commission and have been in existence to this day. They are now in France. They fought the Indians, when necessary, from the very first and were ready to protect Columbus, together with the help of all other males in that dreadful time. In 1836 matters with the Indians were so unsettled that Columbus also organized the Cadet Rifles and Muscogee Blues. This was the year of the war with the Seminole Indians in Florida. Many men volunteered from Columbus and fought in that war. The maternal grandfather of the writer was one of these and he carried a bullet to his death from a wound in that war. He gave a son to the Mexican war, three sons and two grandsons to the Civil war, and two of his great grandsons are fighting in France. Federal and state troops rendezvoused for these troubles in 1836. Forty-four Georgia companies were in Columbus at the call of General Winfield Scott. Among them from Columbus were the Columbus Guards, the Muscogee Drafted; the Muscogee Cadet Riflemen and the Muscogee Artillery.

These were strenuous and exciting days. The Indians had threatened to massacre the inhabitants here. All the male population and military men assembled in the Baptist Church yard. All the women were put within the brick wall fence of the old Oglethorpe building. For a long time they went there every night. The wall extended from First to Second avenue and along there and Twelfth street. First avenue was Oglethorpe street, Second was Jackson street and Twelfth was Randolph street. The last vestige of that wall came down a short while ago when the store of Brannon & Carson was located. Paddy Carr, a friendly half-breed Indian, saved the town the night of the intended massacre. You can doubtless read all about him in the Public Library. I cannot undertake to give the list and history of all the military companies of

those and subsequent days, which were in Columbus. There were numbers of them. In 1846 came the war with Mexico. The South took a large share in this important event which finally resulted in fixing the southwestern line for the United States, and ended many other difficulties. Columbus sent her crack company, the Columbus Guards, and many volunteers. A regiment of troops rendezvoused here under Col. Henry R. Jackson, marched to Chehaw in Alabama and entrained for Mexico. It was in this year the City Light Guards organized. Its first captain was a gallant young attorney, A. H. Cooper, who afterwards fell in the Civil war. His descendants are here today. This was a noble company and was a strong rival of the famous Columbus Guards. My earliest recollection, as a boy, was seeing these two companies marching up Broad street one summer afternoon. It was just before the Civil war. In those days there were no paved streets and no central parkway or transfer station. I can see them now. The Columbus Guards were on the west side. The City Light Guards were on the east side. The drum corps was in the center. Captain Paul V. Semmes commanded the Columbus Guards and Peyton H. Colquitt the City Lights. Both companies were in full dress. The Columbus Guards had on red cut-away coats with white fronts and white trousers (this for summer). The City Lights had on blue cut-away coats and buff fronts and blue trousers with buff stripe. There was an abundance of brass buttons and epaulets and shako hats and plumes. At the two bass drums were Peter De Votie and Lymus Jones, and at the fifes were Tom Rhodes and Tom Hicks and the kettle drums were handled by Peter Harris and Henry Harris. All these were colored except the last named. Henry Harris fought through the war with his company and is buried in Linnwood. I saw all this about where Kirven's store now stands. These companies marched in platoon formation and moved as one. They were magnificently drilled. When war broke out they went at once to the front. I saw them march out Randolph (Twelfth street) on the plank road then there and board the train just beyond where Golden's

Foundry now is. We had no Terminal station then. Few of them came back. Captain Semmes was made colonel of the Second Georgia Regiment and afterwards brigadier general of Semmes' brigade. He fell at Gettysburg and is buried in Linnwood. Captain Colquitt was made colonel of the 46th Georgia Regiment. He was commanding a brigade at Chittauga when he fell. His commission as brigadier general had then been issued, but not received at his death. He, too, is buried in Linnwood. There was one other brave man from Columbus, who stood as "Old Rock" in the Civil war, who was a brigade commander.

This was General Henry L. Benning, after whom the Columbus people ask that our camp be named. It may be well just here to say that General Benning, at the time he died in July, 1875, was one of the most widely known and highly esteemed men in Georgia. He was great as a lawyer, judge, soldier and patriot. As a member of the Supreme Court of Georgia, before the Civil War, he ranked with the highest. When war came in the sixties he was one of the first to go out. He raised his own regiment, the 17th, and was its colonel. He was soon promoted to the office of brigade commander, and was attached to Longstreet's bloody corps. I cannot here go into his military record. He was one of the bravest of the brave. He escaped death, but not wounds. He fought through every important battle of the Army of Northern Virginia, and came at last home to help rebuild the fallen fortunes of his country. One of the last signatures of the Secretary of War of the Confederacy was placed on the commission of Henry L. Benning as major general.

If the War Department sees proper to note the suggestion of the people of this historic and patriotic city and name their military camp after General Benning, such a step will be another recognition of what all of our people in Georgia know, and that is that Benning, both in war and peace, was one of our greatest men.

All the above were not the only men or companies who went out in those days. There were hundreds of other brave,

noble soldiers, many never to come back. Everything was war in the sixties and for years afterwards. Besides the two above companies, this city and vicinity in 1861 sent the following: The Southern Guards, Home Guards, Georgia Grays, Confederate States Sentinels, Independent Light Infantry, Muscogee Rifles, Jackson Avengers, Ivey Guards, Semmes Guards, Georgia Light Infantry, Terrell Artillery, Columbus Minute Men and Columbus Flying Artillery. There may have been others not now recalled.

The next real sign of war, after all these companies went forth with fife and drum and brass bands and uniforms and other full equipment, did not come in force till that fateful day in April, 1865. Then General James Wilson, with his ten thousand detached by Sherman and sent southwest to sweep through Alabama and Georgia, came upon us, destroyed the city and \$67,000,000 worth of cotton and other property and went his way to halt before he got to Macon because the war was ended. The pity of it all was that neither they nor our side knew when they destroyed Columbus that hostilities had ceased. Space forbids going into the military history of Columbus in reconstruction days. It would be a long story, and to all of us a sad story. Let it pass. Not till 1898, when we were at war with Spain did we have soldiers. Then we had a brigade and the streets, then as now, were full of "our men." Columbus sent her full complement to fight in this war. And now we have "our men" again. May they come, to be always in this patriotic old town! I have been asked by some (only a few, thank God), why revive such memories? My answer is because memory is the root of all the powers of man. Civilization is memory. Honor is memory. Religion is memory. Blot out memory and nothing is left us. It has been well said that all the beauty and profit of our future grow out of the past as flowers and fruit grow out of the ground. Only by looking back can we go forward.